DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 123 343 CE 006 894

AUTHOR Molnar, Alex
TITLE No More Slogans: Certainly Not Career Education.
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Education; Cultural Images; Educational Accountability; Educational Innovation; Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; Educational Policy; Educational Problems; Educational Responsibility; *Educational Sociology; Employment Practices; *Employment Problems; Language Role; Language Usage; Models; Social Problems; Social Responsibility; *Social Systems; Social Values; Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

Educators, replacing substance with form in their dialogs, argue over symptoms and fail to consider causes. No coherent analysis links practice to social reality, because low-level sloganeering replaces useful analytic language. Particularly offensive, career education, another energy-draining slogan, has clearly reactionary potential. Two developments must be understood: Social problems have been increasingly defined as school problems, keeping educators on the defensive and narrowing the analysis to school practices instead of analyzing schools in society; and, schools have become social credentialling machines, despite evidence that job performance is not significantly related to education. Translating career entry into a school problem (career education) is a bankrupt idea. The illusion that extensive prior training is necessary to master bureaucratic occupations is created by labelling jobs professional. Extended schooling postpones adulthood, while old age comes sooner and sooner. This social problem probably cannot be solved within a capitalist system. Educational sociologists arguing that schools should be relieved of many current responsibilities nevertheless propose a conservative doctrine which assumes a capitalist social system, providing a rationale for reactionary policies; career education provides a slogan, a mechanism for strengthening the status quo, in which the docile teach competitive docility ignoring public interest and humanity. (Author/AJ)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED123343

1537
10/21

APR 22 1976

NO MORE SLOGANS: CERTAINLY NOT CAREER EDUCATION

by
Alex Molnar
Assistant Professor

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201
phone: (414) 963-5659 or 963-4814

CE 006 894

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

NO MORE SLOGANS: CERTAINLY NOT CAREER EDUCATION

There is a famous and often quoted passage from Alice in Wonderland in which Humpty Dumpty and Alice have the following exchange:

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."
>
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master--that's all."[1]

For several years a lot of well intentioned educators have been meeting, arguing over, writing about, analyzing, and developing models for something called Career Education. Yet it remains a slogan without substantive content that serves primarily as a front for any number of instructional activities--some of which are worthwhile, some the same old stuff, some awful. Which instructional activities fit in which category depends on who you ask. Like so many Humpty Dumptys, people in Career Education make it mean precisely what they want it to mean --depending on their purpose.

The Alice in Wonderland game of inventing new slogans every so often that educators either play or support seems an American tradition as much a part of schooling as Mom's mythical apple pie is supposed to be part of the American kitchen. Since inventing slogans is a tradition, plenty of educators just don't resist. After all, it

doesn't seem to hurt anyone. So what if "Progressive Education" in the thirties; "Life Adjustment Curriculum" in the forties and fifties; "Open Education" in the sixties; "Confluent Education" in the seventies didn't result in any fundamental reorganization of our schools--they sure were fun while they lasted. They were, after all, something to write about. We are paying a high price for our folly. As educators we have allowed form to replace substance in our dialogues, we have argued over symptoms and failed to consider causes. We have struggled but we have not advanced. We have no coherent analysis that links our practice to social reality--and perhaps we never shall so long as our language is low level sloganeering instead of a useful analytic tool.

Since all of this has been true for some time, why single out Career Education as a particularly offensive example of an inglorious tradition? It is in truth dangerous not just because it is another energy draining slogan, but because of its clearly reactionary potential. In order to understand this potential, it is necessary to understand two important and related developments of the last thirty or so years--one has taken place in our schools the other in our society.

In our schools there have been humanistic and liberal successes, but these successes have been primarily additive, i.e., they have called upon schools to do more and more; from providing breakfast; to teaching children to read; to helping people develop a positive identity. The consequences of the humanistic/liberal additions to the school's responsibilities is that large numbers of people have been sold on the idea that everything from crime on the streets; to drug addiction; to

the rapidly increasing spread of V.D. can be attributed to a failure of the schools to do their job. Some people seem convinced, for example, that drug education in the schools will be significant in the elimination of drug abuse. These folks are likely to blame the schools when the problem refuses to go away. In other words, social problems have been increasingly defined as school problems--a focus which has kept educators on the defensive, and which has led to the ever narrower analysis of school practices to the detriment of an analysis of schools in society. Minority demands for justice have over the years become more and more focused in the struggle for equal educational opportunity --a struggle which while both just and worthwhile has also contributed to the definition of social problems as school problems.

Schools have become a social credentialing mechanism, i.e., people are routinely denied access to occupations not necessarily because of a lack of skill or potential, but because they don't have the proper diploma (credential). In many occupations the entry point already requires an M.A., in some a Ph.D. Despite evidence that job performance is not significantly related to high school, undergraduate, or graduate education except in the most arcane or technical fields--and even then most real learning occurs on the job. Since a diploma stands between someone who wants to work, and an opportunity to be considered for employment (not work itself--just a candidate for work) in most occupations the first struggle becomes to get a diploma Minority people and poor people frequently find this boundary impossible to cross. In schools as in society, the cards are stacked against them, the use of IQ tests to sort people, underfunding, etc., etc., etc., the litinay is long and well-documented. These practices must

be combated--however even if they are changed a substantial number of our students will find that they can not find satisfying employment at a livable wage. Furthermore, a strategy which results in too many people competing for too few jobs is no long range solution. Indeed such a strategy is ultimately destructive unless society is altered as well as the schools.

Translating career entry into a school problem as Career Education attempts to is a bankrupt idea. Understanding some contemporary social developments helps to explain, at least partially, why this is true. For example, occupations have become increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized. Over the past half century occupations have increasingly become occupations <u>within</u> large complex bureaucratic institutions. Countless career lines have been created to handle relationships between and among people in these institutions, in a phrase a large and ever expanding number of people in our labor force have become bureaucrats. They directly produce nothing. Instead they service people and things much the same way large numbers of troops are never committed to battle, their task being the support of front line soldiers. Although most of these jobs do not require that workers have the kind of sophisticated and specialized knowledge and skill that has been one of the historic characteristics of a professional, many, perhaps most, have been labeled professional occupations. This labeling continues despite the fact that a reasonably intelligent adolescent who can read and write could quickly acquire the knowledge necessary to perform most of these jobs in a relatively short period of time. The illusion that extensive prior training is necessary is created by labeling the job

professional. Entry into a profession requires a credential, and the credential required is usually either a diploma or is earned as a result of time spent successfully in school. As the number of jobs has declined in relation to the number of potential workers, the response of our political and economic system has been to attempt to constrict the number of job seekers by requiring that they spend more time in credentialing agencys, primarily the schools, before they can be considered for jobs. This extended stay in schools may socialize people more thoroughly into the behavioral norms that are needed to maintain the smooth functioning of our various bureaucracies but little else is accomplished in terms of better job performance. Longer and longer periods of schooling have, in effect, delayed adulthood in our society for ever increasing numbers of people until well into their twenties. By that I mean that although most people are biologically adult by their mid-teens, they cannot function as adults socially for another decade because they are cut off from meaningful sustaining employment until then. As many unemployed Ph.D.'s will attest the gap between biologic and social adulthood is still widening. At the same time that adulthood is being deferred old age seems to come sooner and sooner as older people are pushed from jobs to make room for younger people. Where they are pushed out to is as much a never never land as the limbo of endless schooling for a twenty year old. It is quite possible, even likely, that this social problem cannot be solved within a capitalist social system. It is a cruel hoax to pretend that something called Career Education is even a band-aid on this gaping wound. Yet that is precisely what we are being asked to believe. We are being

asked to ignore the real problem, which is the way our society is organized, and we are being asked to trick people into believing that the problem is elsewhere. Shall we tell unemployed auto workers that Career Education would have helped--how long are we willing to be dupes and frontmen?

How long are we willing to accept the leadership of house sociologists who are now arguing that schools have been asked to do too much --that their area of responsibility should be primarily cognitive development of children and that other sectors of the society should assume many of the schools' current responsibilities. While this analysis seems radical (wasn't it Ivan Illich who first started talking about de-schooling society several years ago?) it is, as proposed by these sociologists, a conservative doctrine. It holds out the hope of de-schooling society and putting an end to the practice of defining social problems as school problems besides. In my judgement that hope is a false hope because its starting and ending point is our existing social system (Illich's analysis recognizes no such constraint). Since it assumes a capitalist social system, its conclusions will be bounded by the limits of that system. Thus, this increasingly popular sociological critique of the way we educate our young and prepare them for adulthood has helped provide a rationale for the reactionary social policies of our national administration and Career Education has provided a slogan. Career Education is not a mechanism for fundamental social educational change but for strengthening the status quo. Frank Pratzner, a Career Education advocate, says it with chilling clarity:

> The ultimate goals of Career Education are individuals with stable work personalities who are (a) adjusted to and satisfied with their occupational roles in society; (b) satisfactory to both their employers and to the society of which they are a part; and (c) employed in an occupation contributing to the balance in the supply and demand for professional and non-professional manpower.[2]

LaDuca and Barnett have, I believe, correctly accused the Career Education movement as:

> ". . . portraying our capitalistic society as a Walt Disney world in which Career Educated dwarfs skip gaily off to their dignified and redemptive jobs in the mines, mills, and greasy spoons of the nation (and) they do so singing joyfully, Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to meaningful work we go."[3]

Heavily supported by Federal Funds the Ohio State University Center for Vocational and Technical Education, a major force in the Career Education movement, began developing a Career Education curriculum in 1971. It has established a network of school districts to help develop a Comprehensive Career Education Model (CCEM). Commenting on the program goals of this Career Education model, Scott Greer recounted:

> I had the terrible feeling as I read the goals that we were dealing with a system in which the docile taught docility, but a competitive docility. It could teach conformism yet have little place for the collective good, the public interest, the human race . . . .[4]

I believe Greer's discomfort is well founded and that empty slogans in general and Career Education in particular must be opposed by all of us who would transform our society into something better, something more humane, something more just.

Those of us in teacher education cannot escape our responsibility because we are implicated at all levels of schooling from pre and in-service training to curriculum development, to helping formulate policy recommendations. We must allow ourselves to be used.

References

1. Carroll, Lewis, Alice's Adventures in Wonderworld and Through the Looking Glass. Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates and Company, 1923. p. 123.

2. Pratzner, Frank C., "Career Education in Goldhammer and Taylor," p. 178. Career Education: Perspective and Promise. Keith Goldhammer and Robert E. Taylor. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company, 1972.

3. LaDuca, Anthony and Lawrence J. Barnett, "Career Education: Program on a White Horse." New York University Education Quarterly. Vol. V, No. 3, Spring, 1974.

4. Institute For Educational Development, "A Review of the Developmental Goals for the Comprehensive Career Education Model" New York: IED, 1973.